

Getting beneath the Empty Homes data

– Scottish Borders Council

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empty homes
partnership



every home matters



Introduction

This report draws on data available on empty homes on the Scottish Government and National Records of Scotland websites alongside data on population and dwellings on the two sites in relation to Scottish Borders Council (SBC).

It is part of the work the Partnership is taking forward to develop a more detailed understanding of what is driving the net increase in numbers of long term empty homes across Scotland, going beyond the official definition of long term empty (a dwelling empty for six months or more that is liable for council tax) to build a fuller, more detailed picture of the trends across all vacant properties and second homes.

The report begins with an analysis of the overall long-term empty figures for SBC between 2016 and 2019, including looking at them in the wider context of changes to population, number of dwellings and unoccupied properties exempt from council tax.

The next section looks at the variations in levels of empty homes and unoccupied exemptions across the 143 data zones that SBC comprises.

Section 3 provides an overview of data zones with more than 5% of properties long-term empty and/or with high levels of unoccupied exemptions or second homes to consider if and how these may be connected.

The final three sections of the report look in more detail at data zones and areas with more than 5% of properties long-term empty. The first section focuses on Hawick, the next on Galashiels and Gala-Langlee, and the final one on other data zones that have reported LTE rates of 5% or more in at least one year between 2016 and 2019.

While observations are made throughout the report, they are all drawn from data and not first-hand local knowledge. As such they are intended to inform discussions and offer points to consider in developing empty homes work, as opposed to being definitive conclusions or recommendations of steps to take.

Throughout the report any references to increases or decreases should be read as net totals unless stated otherwise.

Where references are made to the national average, it should be noted that, unless otherwise stated, 2018 average figures have been used (3.2% vacant properties, 1.5% long term empty properties LTE and 1.7% unoccupied exemptions). In 2019, while vacant stock remained at 3.2%, the split between LTE and unoccupied exemptions altered slightly to 1.55% and 1.65% respectively.

Section 1: Overview of long term empty homes figures 2016–2019

The headline figure and what sits underneath it.

Between 2016 and 2019, SBC has seen its number of long-term empty homes rise by 4.6% from 1,379 to 1,443. This was driven by a 2.8% increase in 2017 (to 1,419), and a 3.5% increase in 2018 (to 1,469). In contrast there was a 1.8% fall in 2019.

Year	Number of long term empty properties	Increase/decrease by volume	Increase/decrease by %
2016	1,379	n/a	n/a
2017	1,419	40	2.8
2018	1,469	50	3.5
2019	1,443	-26	-1.8

However, the headline figure only tells part of the story, and it is important to also look at figures published by Scottish Government that show number of properties empty for more than 12 months.

Breaking the figures down to show the volumes and trends in properties becoming empty for 6 to 12 months or remaining empty for longer than 12 months, as well as the percentages of empty properties falling into each category, can provide an insight into the flows into and out of long term empties, which can provide further insight into the local market. For example;

Where the % of empty homes that have been empty for between 6 and 12 months is higher than 60% of total LTE it may suggest that many homes come back into use between 6 to 12 months, and the problem is not that properties aren't being returned to use, but that, on the whole, it is just taking a little longer than normal.

In contrast, where the % of empty homes that have been empty for more than 12 months is significantly higher than 60% it may suggest that the problem is not that large numbers of properties are becoming empty, but that a large group of properties have remained empty for several years, making it comparably harder to bring them back into use.

Following on from this, if the number of properties empty for more than twelve months is growing, and the number of properties empty between 6 to 12 months is relatively stable, it may suggest market failure, with higher percentages of properties that become empty not being brought back into use within a year, as well as a large number of properties that have already been empty for two years or more.

With this in mind, in SBC there are significant differences between changes in levels of properties empty for 6 to 12 months, and properties empty for more than twelve months;

Year	Number of properties empty for between 6 and 12 months	Increase/decrease by volume	Increase/decrease by %
2016	491	n/a	n/a
2017	522	31	6.2
2018	594	72	13.8
2019	598	4	0.7
2016-2019	n/a	107	21.8

Year	Number of properties empty for longer than 12 months	Increase/decrease by volume	Increase/decrease by %
2016	888	n/a	n/a
2017	897	9	1
2018	875	-22	-2.7%
2019	845	-30	-3.4%
2016-2019	n/a	-43	-4.8

- As shown above, over the period as a whole the number of properties reported as empty for between 6 and 12 months rose by 21.8% from 491 to 598 between 2016 and 2019.
- In contrast the number of properties reported as empty for more than 12 months, fell by 4.8% from 888 to 845 over that period.

If we then look at how the total figure for long term empty homes divides up between properties empty for 6 to 12 months and properties empty for over 12 months we see the following;

Year	Total number of long term empty properties	% empty for 6 to 12 months	% empty for more than 12 months
2016	1,379	35.6	64.4
2017	1,419	36.8	63.2
2018	1,469	40.4	59.6
2019	1,443	41.4	58.6

Observations:



The increasing percentage of long term empty properties empty for between 6 and 12 months, suggests that the rise in overall numbers of long-term empty properties has been driven by increased numbers of properties becoming empty, rather than remaining empty for longer than 12 months.

In terms of inflows and outflows into the 12+ months empty total, this suggests that the inflow is being reduced, and the outflow is increasing. The reduced inflow is encouraging, as it implies that most of the 598 properties that were empty for 6 to 12 months in the 2019 figures are likely to be returned to use within 12 months, which will help to limit or possibly reduce the number of long-term empty homes when the 2020 totals are published at the end of this year.

However, at the same time, if there are fewer properties becoming empty for more than twelve months, it suggests that many of the homes remaining within that category have now been unoccupied for three years or more, thereby increasing the challenges, and work needed, to bring them back into use.

Looking at empty homes figures in the context of changes to population and number of dwellings.

Two factors that can contribute to increasing numbers of homes becoming empty, and fewer empty homes being brought back into use, are declining population and increased numbers of dwellings. Even where population is rising, there is the risk that increased total dwellings may outstrip demand and lead to increases in numbers of empty homes. If older stock is not energy efficient, or in need of refurbishment, it is likely that these homes will be empty rather than new builds.

The increasing trend towards smaller households can of course mean that even where population is declining, more dwellings are needed. However, this can lead to a mismatch in supply and demand with many existing, older dwellings, becoming or remaining empty as they are unsuitable for modern living – although they may appeal to developers looking for properties that can be converted to smaller units.

Year	Number of dwellings in SBC	% increase	SBC Population	% increase
2016	57,628	n/a	114,030	n/a
2019	58,425	1.4	115,270	1.1

In contrast to some areas with declining population, these figures seem roughly matched and do not suggest that changes in the balance between supply and demand is leading to increased numbers of homes becoming empty. While it could arguably be a factor in the number of homes remaining empty for more than a year, if new homes are the choice of people who would otherwise have looked to bring a long-term empty home back into use, there is also a counter argument that new builds can increase the general desirability of an area and lead to increased interest in buying existing stock.

Much may depend upon the location of the new builds in relation to the empty stock. The areas in SBC with more than 5% of properties long term empty do not immediately appear to be close to locations that have seen significant increases in dwellings.

What happens when we add unoccupied exemptions into the mix?

In addition to categories such as 'awaiting demolition' or 'new build properties built in the last six months', unoccupied exemptions include repossessed properties, properties where the owner has died and a grant of confirmation has not been issued (or was issued within the last six months) properties where the owner is in long term care, and properties undergoing substantial repairs or structural alteration (for up to 12 months from when it became unoccupied).

These can add to the impression people have of the issue of long-term empty homes, even though they do not fall within the official definition. They can further reduce the appeal of an area for buyers, if there are a large number of unoccupied exemptions in an area, and they can also act as a magnet for anti-social behaviour and other problems associated with long term empty properties. Additionally, today's unoccupied exemption may become tomorrow's long-term empty where, for example, a grant of confirmation is issued.

For these reasons, it is important to look at empty homes within the context of vacant property figures as a whole, in order to understand the wider challenges that owners and local authorities will be facing in some parts of the country.

The number of unoccupied exemptions in SBC has fluctuated widely in the last four years as shown below. The falls and rises do not seem to correlate directly with numbers of long-term empties, so it is hard to say, at a local authority level at least, the extent to which properties may have moved between long term empty and unoccupied exemptions. However, it does not appear that an increase in one total is masking a decrease in the other.

Year exemptions	Number of unoccupied by volume	Increase/decrease by %	Increase/ decrease
2016	1,593	n/a	n/a
2017	1,243	-350	-22
2018	1,463	220	15
2019	1,334	-129	-18.8
2016-2019	n/a	-259	-16.25%

Observations



The fluctuations in unoccupied exemptions could be a good indicator of the number of empty properties that are being brought back into use within a 12 month period. As there isn't a six month qualifying period before unoccupied exemptions are recorded in statistics, a rise in totals one year and a fall the next is likely to be because many of the properties that became unoccupied exemptions in year 1 are no longer unoccupied exemptions in year 2. They could have become long term empty homes, second homes, demolitions, or fallen into other categories of unoccupied properties. However, for that to happen, the number of properties falling into those categories would need to have increased sufficiently to absorb the falls in unoccupied exemptions. If this has not happened, then it is likely that they have been returned to use.

This could be, for example, because they were properties where the previous owner had died and probate has now been granted and the house has been sold, or because they were properties that were repossessed but have now been sold. They may also be unfurnished rental properties that have been reoccupied by new tenants. All of these would see the property being brought back to use. Likewise, if a person who was in a care home, or other accommodation that meant their property was empty and exempt from council tax, subsequently returns to the property, it will cease to be exempt, although this would not have any wider read across to efforts to bring empty homes back into use elsewhere.

The % of unoccupied exemptions within overall vacant stock (long term empty and unoccupied exemptions) has varied considerably in SBC over recent years, in contrast to a more consistent split between long term empty and unoccupied exemptions in the country as a whole.

Year	Total vacant stock (SBC)	% of vacant stock LTE (SBC)	% of vacant stock unoccupied exemption	Total vacant stock (Scotland)	% of vacant stock exemption (Scotland)	% of vacant stock unoccupied
2016	2,972	54	46	80,021	55	45
2017	2,662	47	53	80,635	54	46
2018	2,932	50	50	84,595	53	47
2019	2,777	48	52	85,546	53	47

The fluctuations in unoccupied exemptions have meant that overall levels of vacant properties in SBC have also fluctuated far more than long term empty property totals alone, and in contrast with the upward trajectory seen nationally.

Year	Total vacant stock (SBC)	Increase/decrease % (SBC)	Total vacant stock (Scotland)	Increase/decrease by % (Scotland)
2016	2,972	n/a	80,021	n/a
2017	2,662	-10.5	80,635	0.8
2018	2,932	10.1	84,595	4.9
2019	2,777	-5.3	85,546	1.1
2016-19	n/a	-6.6	n/a	6.9

However, this has to be seen in the context of overall numbers, and at 2.5% of its housing stock in 2018, its overall level of unoccupied exemptions was 0.8% higher than the national average. Similarly, also at 2.5% that year, its overall level of long-term empty properties was 1% higher than the national average.

Section 2: Data zone overview

How do the vacant home figures break down at data zone level?

SBC has 143 data zones. Using 2016-19 information we can track levels of LTE, unoccupied exemptions, and vacant properties across the data zones.

Long term empty properties

	2016	2017	2018	2019
At or below Scotland average (1.5%)	51	52	48	46
Above Scotland average but at or below SBC average (2.5%)	36	36	39	43
Between 2.5% and 4% (of which, were at or above 3%)	39	36	36	34
	(25)	(20)	(28)	(21)
Between 4% and 5%	11	9	10	12
Above 5%*	6	10	10	8

Unoccupied exemptions

	2016	2017	2018	2019
At or below Scotland average (1.7%)	43	63	42	61
Above Scotland average but at or below SBC average (2.5%)	37	37	41	32
Between 2.5% and 4% (of which, were at or above 3.4%)	48	32	51	39
	(12)	(9)	(19)	(8)
Between 4% and 5%	8	8	5	6
Above 5%	7	3	4	5

Vacant properties

	2016	2017	2018	2019
At or below Scotland average (3.2%)	47	55	43	52
Above Scotland average but at or below SBC average (5%)	32	44	43	38
Between 5% and 6.4%	34	16	24	26
Between 6.4% and 8%	14	17	17	12
Between 8% and 10%	11	4	9	10
Above 10%*	5	7	7	5

The picture that emerges from the tables is one of a local authority with marked contrasts between data zones.

Looking at long-term empties only, the number of data zones at or below the 1.5% national average in 2019 was 46. The number of data zones with at least double the national average was 41.

When we look at the local authority average of 2.5%, a more marked disparity emerges. 89 (62%) of the data zones are at or below the average, and 8 (6%) have more than twice the average.

Similarly, with vacant properties as a whole, 53 data zones are below the 3.2% national average in 2019 and 27 have more than twice this amount, but looking at the local authority average of 5%, 90 (63%) of the data zones are at or below the average and 5 (3.5%) have more than twice the average.

Looking at the LTE figures across the whole of the 2016–2019 period, it is noticeable that the number of data zones below the national average has steadily fallen since 2017, while numbers at or below the SBC average has remained constant.

The number of data zones with over 4% of properties LTE has also remained constant since 2017. This suggests that the drivers of the reduction in LTE totals for 2019 comes from within the data zones where between 2.5 and 4% of properties are LTE. These are unlikely to be areas where the majority of very long term empty properties (i.e 3 years or more) are located.

With substantial differences in levels of vacant property across data zones, there is no one size fits all solution for empty homes in SBC. What may work in a data zone with a below average level of empty properties or vacant stock is unlikely to work in an area with twice that amount.

Section 3: Overview of data zones with highest levels of long term empty and other unoccupied property.

Where are the highest levels of empty properties?

The table below shows the data zones with 5% or more properties empty in at least one year from 2016 to 2019.

Datatypes with 5% or higher LTE properties.

2016	2017	2018	2019
Galashiels - N - Town Centre	Hawick Central - Trinity	Hawick West - Crumhaugh	Hawick Central - Wellogate
Greenlaw	Hawick Central - Town Centre		Hawick Central - Town Centre
Hawick Central - Town Centre		Galashiels - N - Town Centre	Hawick Central - Trinity
Hawick Central - Trinity		Hawick Central - Wellogate	Hawick North - Commercial Road
Hawick Central - Wellogate	Galashiels - N - Town Centre	Hawick Central - Town Centre	Hawick West End - Crumhaugh
Hawick West End - Crumhaugh	Hawick Central - Wellogate	Hawick Central - Trinity	Galashiels N - Town Centre
	Innerleithen - West		
		Swinton Leithholm and Fogo Area	Cranshaws - Abbey St Bathans Area
	Hawick North - Commercial Road	Jedburgh - Abbey	
	Kelso S - Maxwellheugh	Hawick North - Commercial Road	

Colour code

- More than 5% in all four years
- More than 5% in any three years
- More than 5% in any two years
- More than 5% in one year



The table is dominated by data zones from within the Hawick and Galashiels/Gala-Langlee data zones. These two areas are looked at in greater detail in section 4 of this report, alongside other data zones that have had more than 5% of properties LTE in any given year.

The rest of this section considers the relation between levels of long term empty properties and other types of unoccupied property, beginning with unoccupied exemptions.

What evidence is there that unoccupied exemptions are going hand in hand with long term empties?

The three tables below show the data zones with;

- the 10 highest levels of vacant property in 2019.
- the 10 highest levels of long term empty properties in 2019;
- the 10 highest levels of unoccupied exemptions in 2019;

Ten data zones with largest % of vacant property	Vacant property ranking (% vacant)	LTE ranking (% LTE)	Unoccupied exemption ranking (% UE)
Gala - Langlee - West	1 (16.97%)	77 (1.83%)	1 (15.14%)
Hawick Central - Wellogate	2 (14.17%)	2 (7.42%)	2 (6.75%)
Hawick Central - Town Centre	3 (10.91%)	1 (7.72%)	22 (3.19%)
Teviothead and Hermitage Area	4 (10.14%)	11 (4.67%)	5 (5.48%)
Hawick Central - Trinity	5 (10.14%)	3 (7.37%)	38 (2.76%)
Galashiels - N - Town Centre	6 (9.96%)	4 (6.20%)	15 (3.76%)
Hawick Central - Millers Knowes	7 (9.54%)	13 (4.56%)	6 (4.99%)
Hawick North - Commercial Road	8 (9.11%)	7 (5.30%)	14 (3.81%)
Kelso S - Abbey	9 (8.90%)	12 (4.57%)	8 (4.34%)
Cranshaws - Abbey St Bathans Area	10 (8.65%)	8 (5.13%)	18 (3.53%)

Ten data zones with largest % of LTE property	Vacant property ranking (% vacant)	LTE ranking (% LTE)	Unoccupied exemption ranking (% UE)
Hawick Central - Town Centre	1 (7.72%)	22 (3.19%)	3 (10.91%)
Hawick Central - Wellogate	2 (7.42%)	2 (6.75%)	2 (14.17%)
Hawick Central - Trinity	3 (7.37%)	38 (2.76%)	4 (10.14%)
Galashiels - N - Town Centre	4 (6.20%)	15 (3.76%)	5 (9.96%)
Hawick West End - Crumhaugh	5 (5.84%)	57 (2.26%)	14 (8.10%)
Coldstream - South	6 (5.62%)	69 (2.07%)	18 (7.69%)
Hawick North - Commercial Road	7 (5.30%)	14 (3.81%)	6 (9.11%)
Cranshaws - Abbey St Bathans Area	8 (5.13%)	18 (3.53%)	10 (8.65%)
Selkirk - Heatherlie	9 (4.72%)	37 (2.78%)	19 (7.50%)
Morebattle Hownam and Area	10 (4.68%)	23 (3.19%)	16 (7.87%)

Ten data zones with largest % of unoccupied exempt property	Unoccupied exemption ranking (% UE)	LTE ranking (% LTE)	Vacant property ranking (% vacant)
Gala - Langlee - West	1 (15.14%)	77 (1.83%)	1 (16.97%)
Hawick Central - Wellogate	2 (6.75%)	2 (7.42%)	2 (14.17%)
Gala - Langlee - Central	3 (5.95%)	104 (1.39%)	20 (7.34%)
Kelso S - Maxwellheugh	4 (5.52%)	137 (0.34%)	34 (5.86%)
Teviothead and Hermitage Area	5 (5.48%)	11 (4.67%)	4 (10.14%)
Hawick Central - Millers Knowes	6 (4.99%)	13 (4.56%)	7 (9.54%)
Earlston and Melrose Landward	7 (4.73%)	34 (3.38%)	13 (8.11%)
Kelso S - Abbey	8 (4.34%)	12 (4.57%)	9 (8.90%)
Galashiels - W - Thistle St	9 (4.12%)	18 (4.12%)	11 (8.24%)
Dryburgh Charlesfield Maxton Area	10 (4.07%)	20 (4.07%)	12 (8.14%)

Of the 10 data zones with the highest levels of vacant property in 2019;

- 9 were amongst the 20 data zones with highest levels of long term empty properties
- 8 were amongst the 20 data zones with the highest levels of unoccupied exemptions.
- 7 were amongst the 20 data zones for both long-term empty properties and unoccupied exemptions.

Of the ten data zones with the highest levels of LTE properties

- 4 were amongst the 20 data zones with the highest levels of unoccupied exemptions.

Of the ten data zones with the highest levels of unoccupied exemptions

- 6 were amongst the top 20 data zones for LTE properties.

This suggests a high correlation between long term empty properties and unoccupied exemptions.

Is there anything to suggest that LTE properties are going on to become unoccupied exemptions rather than being returned to use?

The four data zones with the highest levels of unoccupied exemptions have all seen significant shifts between levels of long term empty and levels of unoccupied exemptions in recent years. This is demonstrated in the tables below.

Gala – Langlee – West	Vacant	Unoccupied	LTE
2016	5.01%	2.64%	2.37%
2017	6.81%	1.05%	5.76%
2018	10.70%	4.70%	6.01%
2019	16.97%	15.14%	1.83%

Hawick Central – Wellogate	LTE	Unoccupied	Vacant
2016	10.06%	3.35%	13.41%
2017	10.36%	3.19%	13.55%
2018	6.05%	6.45%	12.5%
2019	7.42%	6.75%	14.17%

Gala – Langlee – Central	Vacant	Unoccupied	LTE
2016	3.57%	1.98%	1.59%
2017	4.38%	1.59%	2.79%
2018	6.94%	2.78%	4.17%
2019	7.34%	5.95%	1.39%

Kelso S – Maxwellheugh	LTE	Unoccupied	Vacant
2016	4.51%	1.39%	5.90%
2017	5.5%	0.69%	6.19%
2018	1.38%	6.55%	7.93%
2019	0.34%	5.52%	5.86%

In Gala – Langlee – West the drastic fall in long term empty properties in 2019, was accompanied by a more than three-fold rise in unoccupied exemptions. It seems clear that the fall in long term empty homes is not the result of homes being returned to use. However, with an overall rise of 6% in the level of vacant property, it is also clear that there is more going on than properties simply moving between being LTE and unoccupied exemptions.

Hawick Central – Wellogate – is part of the region with the largest number of data zones with more than 5% of stock long term empty. As the data zone with the second highest level of vacant properties, it is noticeable that the 4% fall in long term empty properties in 2018 has not been matched by a subsequent drop in overall levels of vacant property. It appears that a lot of the homes that ceased to be LTE in 2018 simply became unoccupied exemptions rather than being returned to use. In 2019 the small fall in vacant property levels from the previous year was reversed, and overall vacant stock is now higher than in 2016.

After two years of rising levels of long term empty homes, Gala-Langlee-Central saw a significant dip in levels of long term empty homes in 2019. However, its overall level of vacant stock rose due to a significant increase in unoccupied exemptions. This suggests that the properties that ceased to long term empty may not have been brought back into to use.

Kelso S – Maxwellheugh levels of unoccupied exemptions fell in 2019, one year after the large shift from long term empty to unoccupied exemptions in its vacant homes total. Its % of long term empty properties also fell in 2019. This may suggest that some properties that moved from LTE to unoccupied exemptions are now being brought back into use. Overall levels of vacant property in 2019 were lower than in 2016.

Unoccupied exemptions and demolitions or removal from housing stock.

It is worth noting that the data zone that previously had the highest levels of unoccupied exemptions between 2016 and 2018 – Peebles – N – Cuddyside – saw % of unoccupied exemptions fall from almost 9% to 0.77% in 2019, a numerical fall of 46. The fall was the result of a reduction in housing stock rather than homes being returned to use however as 2019 saw a fall in total number of properties to 518 properties down from 556 the previous year. It’s % of properties that were long term empty fell from 2.88% to 2.51% in 2019, a numerical fall from 16 to 13.

Is there evidence that unoccupied exemptions or long term empty properties go hand in hand with second homes?

The highest level of second homes is in St Abbs and Eyemouth Landward where 12.54% of properties are second homes. In spite of low levels of unoccupied exemptions and long term empty properties (2.04% and 2.19% respectively) this data zone still has the second lowest level of occupied dwellings in the LA behind only Gala-Langlee-West.

Of the data zones with the twenty highest levels of vacant property, only three are amongst the ten data zones with the highest levels of second homes.

	% occupied dwellings (Occupied dwelling ranking)	% Vacant (Vacant ranking)	% Unocc exempt (Unoccupied exemption ranking)	% LTE (LTE ranking)	% Second homes (Second homes ranking)
Teviothead and Hermitage	84.38% (4)	10.14% (4)	5.48% (5)	4.67% (11)	5.48% (6)
Cranshaws - Abbey St Bathans	85.58% (6)	8.65% (10)	3.53% (18)	5.13% (8)	5.77% (5)
Morebattle, Hownam and Area	83.83% (3)	7.87% (16)	3.19% (22)	4.68% (10)	8.30% (3)

However, when we look at unoccupied (as opposed to vacant) dwellings, nine of the ten data zones with the highest levels of second homes are among the 20 data zones with the lowest occupancy levels.

This suggests that, although high levels of second homes does not on the whole go hand in hand with long term empty or unoccupied properties, there are a significant number of data zones where second homes are having a significant effect on occupancy levels.

Section 4: Hawick

With 7,604 dwellings in 2019, Hawick accounts for 13% of the total dwellings in SBC and 20% of the long term empty homes.

The data zones in Hawick are spread across the Hawick and Denholm and Hawick and Hermitage wards. In a year when LTE and unoccupied exemptions fell by 1.8% and 18.8% respectively across the SBC as a whole, Hawick saw rises in both totals.

Housing in Hawick 2018-2019

	Hawick 2018	Hawick 2019	SBC	Scotland
% of vacant property	6.19%	6.63%	5.0%	3.2%
% of long term empty property	3.44%	3.83%	2.5%	1.5%
% of unoccupied exempt property	2.75%	2.80%	2.5%	1.7%
% of property in council tax band A	62.85%	62.81%	28%	21%
% of occupied property in receipt of single adult council tax discount	46.32%	44.55%	36%	39%
% occupied dwellings exempt from council tax	1.7%	1.7%	1.3%	3.1%
Total number of homes	7,613	7,604	58,555	2,614,982

Observations



Of its 17 data zones, 3 have had more than 5% of properties LTE throughout 2016 to 2019 and 2 others have reached this level in 3 years.

However, as in SBC as a whole, the data zones in Hawick cover all ends of the empty homes spectrum. At the 'top end', 30% of data zones are at or below the national average for long term empty homes (compared to 32% across the LA as a whole) and 24% are at or below the national average for vacant homes (compared to 36% across the LA as a whole).

At the 'bottom end' of the spectrum, 47% of data zones have more than twice the national average for long term empty homes, and 35% have more than twice the national average for vacant homes. Both of these are more than 15% higher than the percentage of data zones falling into these categories across the local authority.

Housing by datazone 2019 (2018 totals in brackets)

	At or below national average	Between national average and Council average	Twice the national average but less than twice Council average	Twice Council average or higher
% of long term empty property	5 (6)	3 (3)	3 (3)	5 (5)
% of unoccupied exempt property	6 (6)	4 (2)	4 (1)	1(1)
% of vacant property	4 (5)	5 (5)	3 (2)	3 (3)
Long term empty and unoccupied exempt figures are both:	3 (4)	6 (4)	2* (0)	1 (2)

*= includes one data zone where LTE is twice SBC average.

This suggests that the 'problem' of empty homes has not been spread evenly across the area, but that it is concentrated within specific areas. However, a more detailed look at housing data shows that it is not simply a case of more prosperous areas having lower levels of empty homes. Some of the data zones with the highest levels of social deprivation are amongst the data zones with the lowest levels of long term empty homes.

The next table illustrates this, showing where each of the data zones sits in terms of % of long term empty, unoccupied exemptions, vacant properties and second homes across SBC as a whole.

The table also shows the 2016 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation overall decile.

Hawick data zones	LTE ranking	UE ranking	Vacant ranking	Second homes	SIMD 2016 decile
Hawick Central - Town Centre	1	23	3	53	4
Hawick Central - Wellogate	2	2	2	69	2
Hawick Central - Trinity	3	38	5	35	3
Hawick West End - Crumhaugh	5	57	15	95	3
Hawick North - Commercial Road	7	14	8	61	3
Hawick Central - Millers Knowes	13	6	7	68	8
Hawick - Burnfoot - South East	21	60	28	114	2
Hawick West End - Crumhaughill and Parkdaill	25	93	47	74	8
Hawick Central - Weensland	53	112	82	124	6
Hawick North - Wilton Hill	70	61	70	57	5
Hawick - Burnfoot - Central	86	97	90	124	1
Hawick Central - Drumlanrig	92	99	101	124	5
Hawick North - Silverbuthall	105	16	54	124	4
Hawick - Burnfoot - North	120	33	79	124	2
Hawick West End - Wilton Dean	130	134	137	104	7
Hawick North - Stirtches	134	137	141	100	5
Hawick - Burnfoot - West	136	65	117	106	2

124 = data zone has no second homes. 104 to 123 = data zone has one second home

Moving on from this, the following table shows the percentage of properties within council tax band A, and the LTE and vacancy rates in each data zone.

Data zone	% stock LTE 2018	% stock LTE 2019	% stock Vacant 2018	% stock Vacant 2019	% of housing stock in Band A
Hawick West End - Wilton Dean	0.72	1.08	1.44	2.16	11.87%
Hawick Central - Weensland	0.92	2.52	2.06	3.67	27.69%
Hawick West End - Crumhaughill and Parkdaill	1.75	3.75	3.25	5.25	31.51%
Hawick North - Stirtches	0.73	0.49	1.46	0.97	35.99%
Hawick Central - Millers Knowes	3.04	4.56	5.64	9.54	40.70%
Hawick North - Silverbuthall	1.57	1.35	4.72	4.94	41.35%
Hawick North - Wilton Hill	3.19	2.0	6.39	4.19	52.10%
Hawick Central - Town Centre	7.24	7.72	10.61	10.91	66.72%
Hawick Central - Wellogate	6.05	7.42	12.5	14.17	69.71%
Hawick Central - Trinity	7.99	7.37	11.87	10.34	73.10%
Hawick Central - Drumlanrig	1.08	1.62	3.94	3.06	73.47%
Hawick West End - Crumhaugh	5.84	5.84	9.04	8.1	76.27%
Hawick North - Commercial Road	5.06	5.3	8.44	9.11	77.38%
Hawick - Burnfoot - South East	3.9	3.97	4.88	6.2	97.01%
Hawick - Burnfoot - West	0.35	0.35	2.13	2.48	97.15%
Hawick - Burnfoot - North	0.32	0.95	0.63	3.81	97.78%
Hawick - Burnfoot - Central	1.8	1.76	3.59	3.23	98.23%

The five highest levels of long term empty properties fall within a cluster of six datazones with between 66% and 78% of properties in Band A. These have at least 14% more properties in Band A and at least 19% fewer properties in Band A than the data zones outside of the cluster.

The reason for low levels of empty properties in the data zones where stock is almost entirely at Council Tax Band A may be linked to general levels of deprivation that prevent people from moving into 'better' housing.

The next tables give a further breakdown of housing stock in the five data zones with the highest levels of long term empty property and Drumlanrig, the other data zone within the cluster.

	Homes in receipt of single adult council tax discount	Second homes	Occupied dwellings exempt from council tax
Hawick Central - Town Centre	273 (45.81%)	9	9
Hawick Central - Wellogate	341 (46.02%)	8	21
Hawick Central - Trinity	204 (47%)	10	6
Hawick Central - Drumlanrig	281 (50.54%)	0	15
Hawick West End - Crumhaugh	245 (46.14%)	3	11
Hawick North - Commercial Road	253 (53.6%)	6	7
Total - 6 data zones	1,597 (47.95%)	36 (1.08%)	69 (2.07%)
Hawick - all data zones	3,138 (41.26%)	57 (0.74%)	120 (1.57%)
Scottish Borders	20,438 (34.84%)	968 (1.65%)	750 (1.28%)
Nationally	988,617 (37.5%)	24,438 (0.92%)	87,162 (3.3%)

The six data zones have the highest levels of properties in receipt of single adult council tax discount, both in numerical and percentage terms.

Other than numbers of second homes, there are no significant differences between Drumlanrig and the other five data zones on these three measures.

However, when housing stock is broken down into council tax bands, a significant difference does emerge.

Data zone (% LTE in 2019)	Band A	Band B	Band C	Band D	Band E or higher
Hawick Central - Town Centre (7.72)	67	19	10	3	1
Hawick Central - Wellogate (7.42)	70	17	8	2	3
Hawick Central - Trinity (7.37)	73	8	8	9	2
Hawick Central - Drumlanrig (1.62)	73	6	4	2	15
Hawick West End - Crumhaugh (5.84)	76	15	4	4	1
Hawick North - Commercial Road (5.3)	77	14	6	1	2
Hawick - all data zones	63	18	6	6	8
Scottish Borders	28	22	12	10	28
Nationally	21	23	16	13	27

Drumlanrig stands out for having 15% of its properties in Band E or higher. This is 12% higher than any of the other data zones and 7% higher than the Hawick average.

Aside from Drumlanrig, Trinity is the only one of the 6 data zones with more than 10% of its housing stock in Band D or higher. Its LTE rate is considerably higher than that of Drumlanrig. A factor that may explain this is the absence of properties at Band E or above.

Where people are moving from Band B or Band C property, they may choose to move to an area with more stock in higher council tax bands, perceiving these to be 'better', more aspirational, areas to live. In five of the six data zones with the highest levels of empty properties, people have to move away to move beyond Band D property. Even where they are moving into Band D property, they may also choose to move to an area where there is property above that band, deeming it to be a 'more prestigious' address.

The danger is that the areas they leave behind get trapped in a cycle of decline, as very few people from outside the area look at it as a place to move to, either to rent or buy property, and more people inside the area look to move away if they can afford to do so.

As to whether any of the observations from Hawick could point the way towards establishing a common profile of features that are associated with areas with large levels of empty homes, a different picture emerges when we look at Galashiels and Gala.

Section 5: Galashiels/Gala

Galashiels and neighbouring Gala - Langlee, make up another area with significantly high levels of long term empty homes. The data zones are all part of the Galashiels and District ward which also includes the Heriot, Fountainhall and Stow areas. The latter areas cover a substantially larger geographical area to the north west of Galashiels and have considerably lower population density, housing and empty homes than the 15 data zones in Galashiels/Gala - Langlee.

With 6,767 dwellings in 2019, the Galashiels/Gala - Langlee data zones account for 11.5% of the total dwellings in SBC and 12.8% of the long term empty properties.

Housing in Galashiels/Gala - Langlee

	Galashiels/Gala 2018	Galashiels/Gala 2019	SBC	Scotland
% of vacant property	6.43%	6.16%	5.0%	3.2%
% of long term empty property	3.52%	2.73%	2.5%	1.5%
% of unoccupied exempt property	2.91%	3.43%	2.5%	1.7%
% of property in council tax band A	41.5%	41.4%	28%	21%
% of property in receipt of single adult council tax discount	45.71%	44%	36%	39%
% occupied dwellings exempt from council tax	3.11%	3.35%	1.3%	3.1%
Total number of homes	6,732	6,767	58,555	2,614,982

Unlike Hawick, the area saw a fall in the % of properties that were long term empty, and also in the % of vacant properties in 2019. The fall in LTE levels was large enough to offset a rise in the % of unoccupied exemptions.

However, the headline figures tell only a part of the story.

The fall in long term empty properties has occurred against a backdrop of a 0.5% increase in the overall number of properties. Across the region, falls in one data zone have often been matched by rises in another data zone. The fall of 52 in the number of long term exemptions accompanied by a rise of 36 in the number of unoccupied exemptions, means that the net change in the number of vacant properties is a mere 16.

The rise in unoccupied exemptions was driven largely by increases in two areas - Gala - Langlee - West and Gala - Langlee - Central. Both of these data zones were looked at in section 3 of this report. In the latter of the two, the increase seems to be almost entirely the result of previous long term empty properties becoming unoccupied exemptions.

At the same time,

All of which makes it important to look at how the picture as a whole breaks up across data zones. In the following table, falls in totals are shown in bold.

Data zone	% stock LTE 2018	% stock LTE 2019	% stock Unoccupied exempt 2018	% stock unoccupied exempt 2019	Net change in % of stock vacant
Galashiels - N - Halliburton	3.42%	3.81%	2.14%	2.33%	0.58%
Galashiels - N - Town Centre	6.64%	6.20%	3.61%	3.76%	-0.28%
Galashiels - N - Windyknowe	4.18%	3.38%	2.99%	2.19%	-1.60%
Galashiels - N - Wood St	2.85%	2.83%*	2.14%	2.47%	0.32%
Galashiels - W - Old Town	4.66%	4.44%	3.96%	2.10%	-2.08%
Galashiels - W - Thistle St	3.88%	4.12%	4.57%	4.12%	-0.21%
Galashiels - W - Balmoral Rd	2.11%	0.94%	1.64%	0.94%	-1.88%
Galashiels - W - Balmoral Pl	4.39%	3.87%	3.66%	3.87%	-0.30%
Galashiels - S - Netherdale	1.68%	1.47%	1.89%	2.52%	0.43%
Galashiels - S - St Peters Sch	1.78%	1.24%	2.54%	1.24%	-1.84%
Galashiels - S - Huddersfield	3.75%	2.21%	3.53%	2.65%	-2.43%
Galashiels - S - Glenfield	1.45%	1.82%	2.18%	2.18%	0.36%
Gala - Langlee - East	1.03%	0.61%	1.65%	1.21%	-0.86%
Gala - Langlee - Central	4.17%	1.39%	2.78%	5.95%	0.40%
Gala - Langlee - West	6.01%	1.83%	4.70%	15.14%	6.27%

*= % change only. Numerical total was same as 2018, but overall number of properties increased by 4.

- 12 of the 15 data zones saw a % fall in long term empties
- 8 saw an overall fall in level of vacant property.
- 1 other data zones saw a fall in level of vacant property in spite of a rise in levels of long term empty properties.
- 8 of the 15 data zones now have lower levels of vacant property than in 2016.

The change between 2018 and 2019 is illustrated in the table below.

Housing by datazone 2019 (2018 totals in brackets)

	At or below national average	Between national average and Council average	Twice the national average but less than twice Council average	Twice Council average or higher
% of vacant property	3 (1)	3 (4)	5 (6)	1 (2)
% of long term empty property	5 (2)	3 (3)	5 (7)	1 (2)
% of unoccupied exempt property	3 (2)	5 (5)	3 (6)	2 (0)
Long term empty and unoccupied exempt figures are both:	3 (1)	1 (3*)	3 (5)	0 (0)
One of long term empty only;	2 (1)	2 (0)	3 (1)	2 (1)
Unoccupied exemption only;	0 (1)	4 (1)	2 (0)	2 (0)

*= includes 2 data zones where 1 was also below national average.

The next table shows where each of the data zones sits in terms of % of long term empty, unoccupied exemptions, vacant properties and second homes across SBC as a whole. The table also shows the 2016 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation overall decile.

Galashiels data zones	LTE ranking	UE ranking	Vacant ranking	Second homes ranking	SIMD 2016 decile
Galashiels - N - Town Centre	4	15	6	85	4
Galashiels - W - Old Town	15	66	27	101	4
Galashiels - W - Thistle St	18	9	11	64	4
Galashiels - W - Balmoral Pl	22	13	17	75	5
Galashiels - N - Halliburton	23	55	31	124	5
Galashiels - N - Windyknowe	33	62	39	93	5
Galashiels - N - Wood St	47	51	45	89	5
Galashiels - S - Huddersfield	63	45	56	120	3
Gala - Langlee - West	77	1	1	113	2
Galashiels - S - Glenfield	79	63	74	87	7
Galashiels - S - Netherdale	99	50	75	121	8
Gala - Langlee - Central	104	3	20	124	1
Galashiels - S - St Peters Sch	112	108	118	99	6
Galashiels - W - Balmoral Rd	121	124	130	118	4
Gala - Langlee - East	131	110	131	124	3

124 = no second homes 104 to 123 = one second home

In contrast to Hawick which has a significant number of data zones at both the top and bottom of the table for long term empty properties, the data zones in Galashiels are scattered fairly evenly across the table. Likewise, in deprivation indicators, while Hawick has 5 data zones that are in the 2 highest deciles, and a further 3 in the third highest, Galashiels has 8 data zones in either the fourth or fifth decile.

Levels of empty homes and social deprivation rankings are more evenly distributed across Galashiels than in Hawick. This makes it difficult to draw any comparisons between the two areas, other than the high levels of empty homes.

The next table looks at distribution of property across the area as a whole in comparison to Hawick.

Council tax bands	A	B	C	D	E+
Galashiels	41	30	5	10	14
Hawick	63	18	6	6	7
Nationally	21	23	16	13	27
Scottish Borders	28	22	12	10	28

Across the data zones as a whole, the largest differences between Galashiels and Hawick are the lower percentage of properties in band A, and the higher percentage of properties in Band D and above.

That said, the area is still has considerably higher levels of property in the two lowest council tax bands and considerably lower levels in the highest council tax bands than either SBC or Scotland as a whole.

The next table looks at how the stock breaks down across the data zones and how this coincides with levels of long term empty and vacant property.

	% Band A	% Band B	% Band C	% Band D	% Band and E above	% LTE	% Vacant	% single adult discount	SIMD decile
Gala - Langlee - West	50.13	46.48	2.87	0.00	0.52	1.83	16.97	38.12	2
Galashiels - N - Town Centre	44.19	44.96	6.78	2.13	1.94	6.20	9.96	42.67	4
Galashiels - W - Thistle St	39.91	34.63	4.36	15.83	5.28	4.12	8.24	46.22	4
Galashiels - W - Balmoral Pl	36.25	49.39	7.06	3.89	3.41	3.87	7.75	40.92	5
Gala - Langlee - Central	78.77	16.87	0.20	4.17	0.00	1.39	7.34	51.39	1
Galashiels - W - Old Town	47.20	33.18	4.67	3.50	11.45	4.44	6.54	46.73	4
Galashiels - N - Halliburton	32.14	18.82	6.55	12.05	30.44	3.81	6.13	35.10	5
Galashiels - N - Windyknowe	28.68	33.08	5.93	4.97	27.34	3.38	5.57	38.97	5
Galashiels - N - Wood St	38.27	27.80	5.05	18.59	10.29	2.83	5.30	40.99	5
Galashiels - S - Huddersfield	56.61	24.45	5.95	8.59	4.41	2.21	4.86	45.47	3
Galashiels - S - Glenfield	19.41	1.10	7.69	39.56	32.23	1.82	4.00	33.45	7
Galashiels - S - Netherdale	27.94	11.55	8.61	20.17	31.72	1.47	3.99	39.08	8
Galashiels - S - St Peters Sch	19.60	13.90	2.23	15.38	48.88	1.24	2.48	35.15	4
Galashiels - W - Balmoral Rd	36.68	49.07	10.28	3.27	0.70	0.94	1.88	36.15	6
Gala - Langlee - East	53.04	32.79	4.86	0.81	8.50	0.61	1.82	40.28	3

Observations



Overall, a low level of Band A properties and a higher level of properties at Band E and above seem to coincide with lower levels of vacant properties.

Equally, a high level of Band A properties and very low levels of properties at Band D and above seem to coincide with higher levels of vacant property.

There also appears to be a correlation between larger numbers of properties in receipt of single adult council tax discount and larger numbers of empty or vacant properties.

However, the distinctions do not seem to be as closely drawn as they are in Hawick. This is another way in which a more homogenous picture emerges across this area compared to the wide disparities seen across Hawick.

Overall, perhaps the only conclusion that can be reached by comparing data zones in Hawick and Galashiels is that in both areas there are different factors that have led to large numbers of homes becoming empty and prevented homes being brought back into use.

Section 5: Other data zones with more than 5% properties LTE

8 other data zones have had more than 5% of properties showing as long-term empty in at least one year between 2016 and 2019. This section looks at each of these areas and makes some observations as starting points for discussion on the different factors that may be driving increasing or decreasing totals.

4 of the 8 data zones fall within the Mid-Berwickshire ward. These are Greenlaw, Coldstream South, Swinton Leithholm and Fogo and Cranshaws - Abbey St Bathans Area.

The other data zones are Innerleithen West (Tweeddale East ward), Kelso S Maxwellheugh (Kelso and District), Teviothead and Hermitage (Hawick and Hermitage) and Jedburgh Abbey (Jedburgh and District).

Mid-Berwickshire data zones

The table below gives summary detail about the four Mid-Berwickshire data zones that have recorded more than 5% of properties as LTE and for the ward as a whole.

	Four data zones	Mid-Berwickshire (14 data zones)
% of vacant property	7.15%	5.29%
% of long term empty property	4.44%	2.64%
% of unoccupied exempt property	2.71%	2.66%
% of second homes	3.54%	1.91%
% of property in council tax band A	23.24%	21.29%
% of occupied property in receipt of single adult council tax discount	32.52%	32.06%
% occupied dwellings exempt from council tax	0.69%	1.7%
Total number of homes	1,440	5,347

Looking at the 4 data zones in more detail, some notable variations emerge.

2019	Greenlaw	Coldstream South	Swinton Leithholm and Fogo	Cranshaws - Abbey St Bathans Area
% of vacant property	6.73%	7.69%	6.07%	8.65%
% of long term empty property	4.17%	5.62%	3.35%	5.13%
% of unoccupied exempt property	2.56%	2.07%	2.9%	3.53%
% of second homes	1.28%	2.66%	4.18%	5.77%
% of property in council tax band A	23.24%	43.36%	13.36%	14.51%
% of occupied property in receipt of single adult council tax discount	25.55%	44.08%	27.82%	25.32%
% occupied dwellings exempt from council tax	0.32%	2.07%	0.21%	0.32%
2016 SIMD Decile	5	3	7	4
Total number of homes	312	338	478	324

Coldstream South stands out for having substantially higher levels of Band A property, occupied dwellings exempt from council tax, and dwellings in receipt of single person council tax discount. Greenlaw is the only one of the four data zones to be below the ward average for second homes.

The next part of this section looks at the four data zones, in order of when they first recorded more than 5% of homes as long term empty.

2016 - Greenlaw

Greenlaw	% Vacant	% LTE	% Unocc exempt
2016	8.65	5.77	2.88
2017	7.37	4.81	2.56
2018	6.09	3.21	2.88
2019	6.73	4.17	2.56

Observations



The continued and significant fall in long term empty stock between 2016 and 2018 was encouraging. Although there was a slight increase in 2019, totals are still considerably lower than they were in 2016. With the number of unoccupied exemptions staying at the same level, there is nothing to suggest that the fall is due to anything other than homes being brought back into use. However, it is worth noting that many, if not all, of the unoccupied exemptions from 2016 may remain in the 2019 figures and could be going unnoticed as they are exempt from council tax. Bringing them back into use could increase council tax revenue.

2017 Coldstream South

Coldstream South	% Vacant	% LTE	% Unocc exempt
2016	9.17	4.44	4.73
2017	10.53	7.02	3.51
2018	5.9	4.42	1.7
2019	7.69	5.62	2.07

Observations



Levels of vacant property has fluctuated widely over the four year period. Dramatic falls in LTE and levels of unoccupied exemptions occurred in 2018, but both totals rose again in 2019. This suggests that properties were not moving between long term empty and unoccupied exemptions, but, in the case of long term empty homes, could also suggest a number of properties empty for several years alongside other properties that may be returning to use between six and twelve months.

2018 Swinton Leithholm and Fogo

Swinton Leithholm and Fogo	% Vacant	% LTE	% Unocc exempt	% Second homes	% occupied dwellings
2016	7.41	4.32	3.09	3.91	88.48
2017	7.45	4.14	3.31	4.55	87.99
2018	8.54	5	3.54	4	87.5
2019	6.07	3.35	2.72	4.18	89.75

Observations



The large fall in the % of LTE homes in 2019, saw this data zone move from 10th to 36th in the list of data zones with the highest levels of long term empty properties. A third of its LTE homes were returned to use. This may have included some properties that had been empty for two years or longer, and it took the % of LTE property to below its 2014 level. Its unoccupied exemptions total also fell, suggesting that LTE properties were not becoming unoccupied exemptions.

2019 Cranshaws - Abbey St Bathans Area

Cranshaws - Abbey St Bathans Area	% Vacant	% LTE	% Unocc exempt	% Second homes	% occupied dwellings
2016	7.07	4.18	2.89	5.47	87.46
2017	7.10	3.55	3.55	5.16	87.74
2018	8.31	4.79	3.51	5.43	86.26
2019	8.65	5.13			

Observations



This data zone has been seeing steadily rising levels of long term empty homes since 2017. Over the same time, it has also seen smaller increases in the % of second homes, while unoccupied exemptions have remained constant after a rise in 2017 (when levels of LTE and second homes last fell).

It has the 6th highest level of second homes in Scottish Borders. It has the lowest level of occupied dwellings in the ward with over 4% fewer occupied dwellings than Coldstream South and Swinton Leithholm and Fogo, in second and third place.

Alongside Swinton Leithholm and Fogo, Cranshaws - Abbey St Bathans in the seventh decile for housing, the 1st decile for access, and has the highest levels of property at Band E and above amongst the four datazones.

However, Cranshaws is in lower deciles for Income (5) Education (4) and Health (6) than Swinton which is in the 8th decile for each of these.

These differences may be the reasons why the data zone is losing permanent residents while still adding to second home owners. It may be an area that is seen as good to visit but not to live in.

Other data zones

The remainder of this section of the report looks at the other data zones that have recorded more than 5% properties LTE in any year between 2016 and 2019.

2017 Innerleithen - West

Innerleithen West is part of the Tweeddale East Ward. The data zone is one of four Innerleithen data zones (the others being North, South and East). West is in the 9th SIMD decile. North and South are in the 7th and East is in the 5th.

Other data zones in 2019

	% occupied dwellings	% Vacant	% unoccupied exempt	% LTE	% Second homes	Number of dwellings	SIMD decile
Innerleithen East	98.03%	1.97%	1.69%	0.28%	0.00%	355	5
Innerleithen North	97.01%	2.14%	0.43%	1.71%	0.85%	234	7
Innerleithen South	95.82%	3.18%	1.51%	1.67%	1.00%	598	7
Innerleithen West	93.26%	4.58%	1.08%	3.50%	2.16%	371	9

The East and South data zones have maintained a fairly constant level of occupied dwelling since 2016, while North and West have both seen 3% increases in occupied dwellings. The increase in occupied dwellings in the North data zone has largely been driven by a 75% fall in second homes (numerically from 8 to 2) while in Innerleithen West it is largely attributable to falls in the levels of unoccupied exemptions, as illustrated in the table below.

Innerleithen West	% Vacant	% LTE	% Unocc exempt
2016	8.24	4.67	3.57
2017	7.24	5.36	1.88
2018	6.67	4.43	2.13
2019	4.58	3.50	1.08

Observations



The 2017 rise in Long term empties has to be seen in the context of an overall fall in the level of vacant stock, driven by falls in the number of unoccupied exemptions.

Some of the fall in unoccupied exemptions in 2017 may have been the result of owners immediately selling properties after being charged the council tax levy following reclassification of unoccupied exemptions into long term empty properties. The rise in long term empties may also have been the result of reclassification with some owners starting to undertake work after properties were reclassified as long term empty. This could in part explain the subsequent fall in 2018 if work was completed and properties returned to use.

2019 has seen both long term empty and unoccupied exemptions fall, and its vacancy rate maintaining its downward trend. However, it still has higher levels of both long term empty properties and second homes than its nearest neighbours.

2017 Kelso S – Maxwellheugh,

Kelso S Maxwellheugh is part of the Kelso and District ward. 9 of the 13 data zones in the ward are in Kelso, with the remaining four in the 'district' part of the ward.

Since 2018 its number of long term empty properties have decreased drastically. In numerical terms from a peak of 16 in 2017 there is now only 1 property recorded as long term empty. However, a look at the wider data suggests that the fall is not the result of a large number of properties being returned to use.

Kelso S – Maxwellheugh	% Vacant	% LTE	% Unocc exempt	% Second homes
2016	5.90	4.51	1.39	1.39
2017	6.19	5.5	0.69	1.37
2018	7.93	1.38	6.55	1.52
2019	5.86	0.34	5.52	1.38

Observations



The data zone is very much an outlier amongst the nine Kelso data zones. Of all 9 data zones, Kelso is the only one to sit in the 10th SIMD decile overall. It is in the 9th or 10th decile in every category except for access where it is in the 3rd decile. This is lower than all of the other Kelso data zones (although the four district data zones are in the 1st decile for access).

It has the highest percentage of properties at Band E and above, with 64% of its properties in this band, more than 20% higher than any other data zone. In contrast, with 10% of properties in Band A to C, it has 34% fewer properties in these bands than any other data zone.

The high level of unoccupied exemptions mean that while it has the third lowest levels of long term empty properties in the nine Kelso data zones (two data zones have no long term empty properties), it has the third highest level of vacant properties and the third lowest level of occupied properties overall.

Kelso S Maxwellheugh vacant property rate is 3% higher than the 4th placed data zone and its occupancy level is 4% lower. The two data zones with lower occupancy rates are Kelso S – Abbey and Kelso S – Bowmont and Edenside.

This table compares the 3 data zones.

	Long term empty	Unoccupied exemption	Second Homes	Occupied dwellings	Band A to C properties	Band E +	SIMD decile
Kelso, S- Maxwellheugh	0.34	5.52	1.38	92.75	10.38	64.01	10
Kelso S – Bowmont and Edenside	3.38	3.38	3.15	90.09	71.17	19.81	5
Kelso S – Abbey	4.57	4.34	2.97	88.13	79.58	12.61	6

Kelso S – Abbey has seen both LTE and unoccupied exemptions rise and second homes fall since 2016. Kelso S – Bowmont and Edenside has seen long term empty and second homes fall (although LTEs doubled in 2019 after a large fall between 2016 and 2018) but unoccupied exemptions has risen.

Given the different make up of Kelso S - Maxwellheugh in comparison to the other two data zones, it is likely that there may be a variety of factors at play across the three areas, with changes to council tax status, via the levy and second homes discount, being responded to in different ways in each of the areas, showing how a one size fits all approach may not be successful in producing consistent outcomes.

2017/2018 Teviothead and Hermitage

Teviothead and Hermitage is part of the Hawick and Hermitage ward, but contrasts with the Hawick both in terms of urban/rural classification (it is in the 5th category while the Hawick data zones are in the 2nd) and access where it is in the 1st access decile making it considerably less accessible than other data zones.

Teviothead and Hermitage	% Vacant	% LTE	% Unoccupied exempt	% Second homes	% occupied dwellings
2016	9.99	3.92	5.77	6.8	83.5
2017	10.93	6.07	4.86	5.67	83.4
2018	10.98	5.08	5.89	5.69	83.3
2019	10.14	4.67	5.48	5.48	84.38

Observations



Teviothead and Hermitage was the only data zone to reach 5% LTE empty properties in 2017 and remain at the same level in 2018. Alongside Cranshaws Abbey St Bathans it also has a significant level of second homes which further reduce occupancy levels. Its housing stock is fairly evenly split with 42% of properties in bands A to C and 40% of properties in Band E or above. This may mean that the high levels of empty homes and unoccupied exemptions are the result of factors separate from the quality or mix of housing stock and more linked to access.

Given occupancy levels remained constant between 2016 and 2019, it suggests that there have been few additional homes becoming and remaining vacant but a significant number moving between the different categories, all of which are likely to have not been fully occupied for some time. The increase in occupancy levels and decrease in levels of vacant property in 2019 is a positive step, as it suggests homes returning to use as residential accommodation (both from long term empty and unoccupied exemptions) rather than as second homes.

However, it is worth noting that there are likely to be a large number of vacant properties that have been empty throughout the 2016 to 2019 period, if not for longer, and these will become increasingly harder to bring back to use the longer they remain unoccupied.

2018 Jedburgh Abbey

Jedburgh Abbey is one of the 17 data zones that make up the Jedburgh and District ward. Five of the 17 are in Jedburgh itself. Jedburgh has the largest population density across the ward.

While Jedburgh Abbey is the only one of the five data zones in the tenth decile for access, it is also the only one of the data zones in the third overall decile. West Central is in the 7th and the remaining three are in the 5th decile.

Jedburgh Abbey has the highest vacancy levels and lowest levels of occupied property amongst the data zones, although the gap between it and other data zones narrowed slightly in 2019.

The narrowing was partly the result of a fall in levels of long term empty property, but also a consequence of rises in levels of vacant property elsewhere.

Data zone	% LTE 2018	% LTE 2019 2018	% Unocc exempt 2019	% Unocc exempt	% Unocc 2018	% Unocc 2019	% Band A - C
Jedburgh - Abbey	5.36%	4.12%	3.92%	3.91%	89.07%	90.12%	83.8%
Jedburgh - Doom Hill	2.26%	0.56%	3.11%	2.26%	94.6%	97.17%	52.58%
Jedburgh - East Central	0.26%	1.30%	1.82%	2.08%	96.85%	95.58%	98.7%
Jedburgh - Howden	0.00%	0.74%	0.74%	0.74%	99.2%	98.52%	97.6%
Jedburgh - West Central	1.93%	2.49%	1.38%	3.04%	95.86%	93.92%	62.6%

The table below looks at Jedburgh Abbey itself.

Jedburgh Abbey	% Vacant	% LTE	% Unocc exempt
2016	6.19	3.09	3.09
2017	6.76	4.1	2.66
2018	9.28	5.36	3.92
2019	8.02	4.12	3.91

Observations

Between 2016 and 2017 the rise in levels of long-term empty properties was offset to a degree by a fall in levels of unoccupied exemptions. However, in 2018 both totals saw equally dramatic rises. In 2019 levels of unoccupied exemptions remained constant while long term empties fell back to their 2017 levels. While this is encouraging, it still means that figures in all three categories are higher than they were in 2016 which is likely to mean that many properties that were vacant in that year are still empty now and will be becoming harder to return to use.

Conclusions

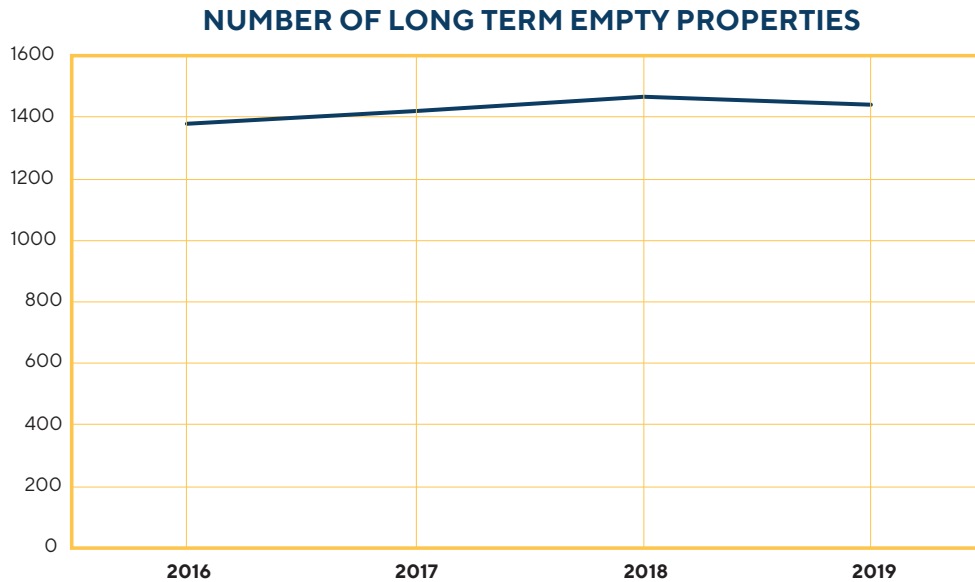
The variations in what emerges across these data zones further illustrate that while there may be some common features across some areas with high levels of empty homes, there is no common profile and there are significant variations within wards and between the data zones.

This again indicates that there is no one size fits all solution, and that tailored interventions are needed based on knowledge of specific localities and surrounding areas. It emphasises the need for a dedicated empty homes service that can work on a case by case level, while also taking a strategic overview of the local authority as a whole, to identify where larger scale interventions may be needed to reverse the trend of declining levels of vacancy.

As the factors behind clusters of high levels of empty homes are often linked to wider economic, social and geographical issues, the larger scale interventions are likely to involve working across local authority remits and linking empty homes work into wider strategies if they are to be effective. This can be a two way street as an effectively delivered empty homes strategy contributes to the delivery of wider local authority commitments.

Summary

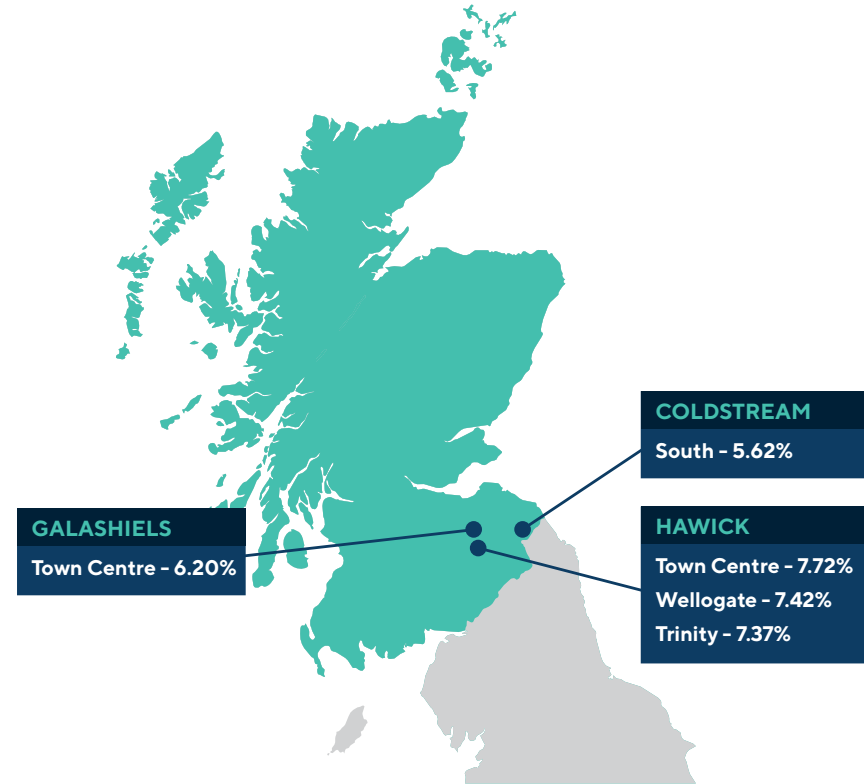
Between 2016 and 2019, SBC has seen its number of long-term empty homes rise by 4.6% from 1,379 to 1,443. (This is taken from a snapshot of data provided to Scottish Government of homes that are recorded as empty for 6 months or more on council tax data).



The data shows us that almost 60% of these have been empty for more than twelve months. This suggests that a significant number of empty homes have been empty for at least 2 years. In reality, in most cases they will probably have been empty for 3 years or longer.

There is a significant drop in the chances of empty properties being returned to use once they have been empty for more than two years. The longer a property has been empty, the harder it becomes to bring it back into use. The condition of the property deteriorates making it less aesthetically appealing and also increasing the amount of time and money required to bring it up to standard for sale, rent or owner occupation.

HIGHEST LEVELS OF LONG TERM EMPTY (LTE) PROPERTIES IN 2019




There are some clusters of data zones in and around town centres where there are high levels of empty homes as a whole although within these there may be significant variations, with some data zones having high occupancy levels. There are also individual data zones with higher levels of empty homes, in some instances coinciding also with larger than average volumes of second homes.



Recommendations

The variety of data zones with high levels of empty homes illustrates the wide range of reasons why homes can become or remain empty, and why a mixture of approaches are needed to make significant and lasting inroads into reducing the total number of empty homes across the LA area.

The table below sets out broad options on how to structure empty homes work into three broad strands that recognise the different approaches needed to bring homes back to use and the wider contribution empty homes work can make to overall strategic delivery.



There is no one size fits all solution, and tailored interventions are needed based on knowledge of specific localities and surrounding areas. This demonstrates the need for a dedicated empty homes service that can work on a case by case level, while also taking a strategic overview of the local authority as a whole, to identify where larger scale interventions may be needed to reverse the trend of declining levels of vacancy.

	DEDICATED EMPTY HOMES SERVICE	EMPTY HOMES STRATEGY	PARTNERSHIP WORKING
Aim	Work proactively with owners of long term empties to bring them back into use.	Improve areas by addressing issues that may have led to, or been caused by, increasing numbers of long term empty homes..	Develop effective partnerships with key stakeholders to address long term empty homes.
Recommended actions	<p>Work with owners of long term empty homes to identify, and work to overcome, barriers to bringing homes back into use.</p> <p>Identify properties that are long term empty and draw up action plans to return them to use where owners cannot be traced or aren't engaging.</p> <p>Make better use of the powers and legislation to engage with owners of long term empty properties and encourage them to bring them back into use.</p>	<p>Develop a matrix to be used to assess the priority for bringing empty properties back into use and draw up a marking scheme for priority scoring.</p> <p>Consider how empty homes work fits into town centre action plans.</p> <p>Identify priority areas to be targeted for action as a result of using priority scoring matrix.</p> <p>Identify areas of highest housing need that correlate with areas that have empty homes and consider options to bring in as affordable housing.</p> <p>Using the matrix to identify those empty properties that can be brought back into use quickly and with limited investment.</p>	<p>Work with Registered Providers to identify opportunities to jointly bring empty homes back into use.</p> <p>Work with colleagues across the Council to identify empty properties and agree the most appropriate action to bring them back into use.</p> <p>Explore opportunities to use the renovation of empty homes to boost the local economy.</p>



